



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing Team #12

Team Lead: Scott Tibbo, CT Westchester Chapter

Team Members: Stevanie Demko, Melanie Mack, James Pack, Kate Rube, Nekesha Sawh, Beccy Smith

People - Plan - Place - Purpose

Our team were given the topic **‘Wellness in the Workplace’** and asked to consider how companies should integrate this within their return to work strategy during and post COVID-19 situation.

This topic has numerous areas and perspectives, which could be discussed so we decided to focus on a particular stakeholder group and specific time; ‘employees’ and the ‘immediate return to work’, although a lot of the content could be applied to any group and future phase.

Our document will talk you through four key aspects or themes related to **People, Plan, Place** and **Purpose** of implementing wellness into the return to workplace strategy for companies.

PEOPLE: Facilitate stakeholder peace of mind with thoughtful planning, engagement and implementation.

Staff are essential to the business and need to feel safe in the workplace. As the world starts to consider “re-entry” of the workplace, the key stakeholders involved in the decision process will be governments, landlords, occupiers (corporations) and individual employees. They all need to **“say yes”** in order to align on the re-entry strategy at a given time and location.

Considerable resources and focus are already being invested into planning a phased safe mobilization of the workforce back to their workplaces. Employers not only have to consider the safety of individual employees but, as such is the nature of coronavirus, also the safety of their employees' families and communities, especially in a post lockdown society.

Key to encouraging staff to return to the office will in demonstrating the following:

1. That the workplace is a safe place to be.
2. That travel to the workplace is worth the real, or perceived, risk of travel.
3. That employee peace of mind can be sustained.
4. That the risk (of travel) is worth it.

PLAN: Gain the trust of employees to feel that the office is a safe place.

A nuanced balanced approach will be required from business leaders when determining **who** returns. The first phase is expected to cover 25% of the workforce.

Organizations will be required to consider Health & Wellbeing **and** Economics as the key drivers. Businesses will naturally want to encourage their most productive as well business critical team members to return to offices.

While such factors should be a part of the considerations evaluated for a return-to-the-office strategy, such planning must also include:

- **Who is prepared to travel?** Based upon perceived risk, concern for their own or household health will vary depending on locations of destinations and/or modes of transport
- **Who can travel?** This includes available transport options, individual or household vulnerabilities.
- **Who needs to travel?** Poor work from home facilities, mental health (loneliness and isolation) or equity (housing quality) should all be considered.

Typically, the only questions companies previously asked of their employees, outside of a physical workplace context was 'How do you commute?' **Now**, the scope of inquiries required will become much more personal and there is a potential HR minefield to be negotiated.

Transparency and **communication** are critical to garnering employees' trust and faith. Every organization needs to develop a transparent two-way communication plan for all employees in advance of any transition back to the office.

The plan should be informed by analysis about the high-risk locations and situations that are a typical part of the organization's former business as usual, with mitigation and change management strategies developed for each.

The plan should include points for ongoing communication, engagement, and opportunities for feedback with employees, and should include specifics on the following topics:

- Guidance on the factors that will inform who is being asked to return to work.
- How that transition will occur and when.
- Ability for employees to request to continue to work from home, and a clear communication pathway to raise concerns, challenges and issues.
- Strategies and expectations in place to protect employees, including how their day can be as contactless as possible.
- Programs and resources that are available to support employees' mental and emotional health during this challenging time.
- Expectations for those returning to work.
- Any relevant groups/taskforces that have been created and opportunities to provide feedback or engage.

Establishing a **mindful reentry** by preparing people mentally prior to reentry as well as the preparation of the physical space will be essential to build confidence that the environment people are entering is safe, healthy and respected. Informing, interacting and communicating with the employees before reentry as to what has been done to reassure certain protocols have been put into place will be of high importance to minimize anxiety.

Support should be provided to help employees transition to their 'new normal,' including consideration of mobile applications which can exist as an encompassing platform for building related planning.

Employees will want to feel **informed** and have set plans on what their movements through the day will be and risk areas. Enabling them to pre-plan the working day will be pivotal. Staff feedback and open mindedness are also essential given changes in protocol, new routines, and comfort levels over time.

PLACE: Redefine how the new workspace will be defined to promote feelings of safety for employees

The workplace needs to meet users' needs **wherever it is** - home or office or an alternative location. However, to encourage stakeholders to transition back to their original office requires demonstration to them that this is better than the alternative of working from home. For the majority of office workers 'the office' is not just a place to get work done - it offers the opportunity for 'person-to-person connections,' 'face-to-face collaboration, a variety of different work settings, and a sense of **identity** and **belonging**.

Many organizations have invested in workplaces that stimulate creativity, social interaction and productivity. The office reflects their values, ethos and vision, which cannot be completely replicated in a home working setting.

Strategies for **reshaping** the office should be informed by evidence-based operational best practices, and to the extent possible, communicated visually to occupants in order to promote transparency and confidence building.

Pre-COVID-19, many of these operational tasks were kept away from the employee experience and deemed back of house procedures. **Now** is the time to bring these procedures to the forefront to show employees that safety and health begins with how we maintain the workplace.

IWMS and IoT platforms can help enable both employees and senior stakeholders to understand the health of their workplace and to facilitate the strategies outlined below. These should include:

- **Social distancing support and guidelines:**
 - Identifying the overall space and revised capacity for employees to return to the office with IWMS and CAFM solutions.
 - Provide ability for employees to book workspace, prior to arriving at the office.
 - Providing digital signage, kiosks and mobile applications which provide real-time visibility to employees on occupied areas.
 - Allowing for automatic booking of cleaning and maintenance services via mobile application.
 - Enabling sensors on nearly everything in the workplace from elevators, washrooms, meeting room entrance, comfort retrieval such as coffee, water and hand sanitizer.

- **Platform enabled maintenance programs to:**
 - Reduce the risk of contamination through surfaces,
 - Clear maintenance and cleaning procedures and schedule,
 - Visual cleaning and sanitization during the day, particularly of high touch surfaces and in common spaces,
 - Reduce common surfaces that need to be touched in the workplace,

- **Promotion of healthy Indoor Air Quality**
 - Air changes recommended and best practice ventilation standards
 - Use of high-quality filtration
 - If possible, sharing air quality data with stakeholders through BMS system
 - Create workplace guidelines which integrate daily facility operations to the wellbeing of employee to mitigate risk.
 - Systems for monitoring and communicating risks any new COVID cases among building users.

PURPOSE: Enhance Connections - Building better relationships and nurturing friendships

Many businesses have developed comprehensive plans as to how they manage connections or communications both employer to employee and colleague to colleague. We have emphasized above the employer/employee dialogue, but we must not overlook how teams continue to build better relationships and nurturing friendships between staff between and within the stay-at-home and return-to-work cohorts.

Teams should identify means of creating or replacing means building and nurturing **professional relationships**. Suggestions could include Online networking events specially designed to foster individual, team and shared connections; or communications training to support vulnerable or isolated stakeholders.

Taking into consideration the above, the consistent message is to ensure the company has a solid communication and change management plan for employees, ensuring there is a **2-way feedback loop** on the return to workplace guide.

In closing, as articulated graphically in the first slide within the attached PowerPoint deck our team recommends as CRE and Client organizations consider how to address the challenges and response to wellbeing in the workplace going forward they carefully incorporate the key strategies and considerations we have outlined related to **People, Plan, Place and Purpose**.

It is also important to note that as all of us experience the upcoming phases of re-entry we will **learn** and **adapt** based on how **human behavior** responds to and influences these strategies – and we need to accept that the solutions around the **balance** of workplace and wellbeing will continue to flex and refine as we all move forward.